

January 20, 2022

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Testimony in Support of Funding for Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings - SB 129
Sponsored by: Senators Waldstreicher & Hettleman

TO: Chairman Smith and Vice Chair Waldstreicher and the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Carol Stern

My name is Carol Stern, and I am testifying in **favor of Funding for Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings**, as a resident of Montgomery County's District 16 and a member of Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Congregation in Bethesda.

The Jewish text that shapes my religious and moral conviction that everyone in an immigration proceeding must have a Right to Counsel is the directive issued in Deuteronomy 16:20, "**Tzedek, tzedek tirdof - Justice, justice shall you pursue.**" The Jewish sages explain that the word tzedek is repeated not only for emphasis but to teach us that in our pursuit of justice, our means must be as just as our ends. Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan wrote "**teach us to respect the integrity of every human soul be it that of a friend or stranger, child or adult.**" When we are working to reform our immigration justice system, we must demand that it operates in accordance with these deeply held Jewish beliefs.

Everyone deserves legal representation, whether they face deportation, eviction, or criminal penalties. Hundreds of our neighbors are separated from their families and incarcerated for civil immigration violations, with no access to a lawyer to advocate on their behalf. To deny legal counsel is to deny due process. The devastating consequences of being without legal counsel are heightened during a pandemic, which poses an extreme threat to detained immigrants in close and often inhumane conditions. This legislation will ensure that all Maryland immigrants who are detained by ICE have access to government-appointed lawyers.

I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB 129.